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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) welcomes the designation of "countries of particular concern" (CPCs) by the Obama administration and its release of the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. USCIRF urges increased U.S. government action to promote freedom of religion or belief.

"The Commission welcomes the first CPC designations of the Obama administration, but is concerned that no new countries were added to the list," said [Leonard Leo](#), USCIRF Chair. "Repeating the current list continues glaring omissions, such as Pakistan and Vietnam. Since CPC designations can be made at any time, we respectfully urge Secretary Clinton to consider the six additional countries we recommended for designation."

The State Department today designated eight countries as CPCs: Burma, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), Eritrea, Iran, the People's Republic of China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan. Earlier this year, USCIRF recommended that the Secretary of State designate those eight as CPCs, and also recommended the designation of Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam.

"We welcome the concurrent release of CPC designations and the State Department's international religious freedom report. This respects the intent of Congress to base designations on these annual reports," said Leo. "Many of the State Department's findings mirror our own: serious religious freedom abuses continue to occur around the world. We urge the State Department to follow up with vigorous U.S. diplomatic activity to seek improvements with respect to this fundamental human right."

"Despite our call for new designations, USCIRF commends the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom and Amb. Johnson Cook for their efforts in comprehensively surveying the situation of religious freedom around the globe," said Mr. Leo.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) requires the State Department to undertake an annual review of every country to "determine whether the government of that country has engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom." Any country meeting that threshold is to be designated a "country of particular concern," or CPC, and the U.S. government is required to take action to encourage improvements in each CPC country. IRFA provides a range of possibilities for such action, from bilateral agreements to sanctions.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at  
This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it  
, or (202) 523-3257.